

Together we can help save our forests.

Last year was Ontario's worst year for forest fires. More than 1,290,500 acres were burned and the cost to the taxpayers of Ontario was thirty-five million dollars. That doesn't include the one and a half million in private property damage, or the value of the timber itself.

With the prolonged drought, this year could be even worse, unless we do something about it right now. Preventing and reporting winter fires is an important first step.



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WINTER FIRES



the fuses have been lit

Right now, at least sixty "sleeper fires" are smouldering on the dry forest floor beneath the snows of Northern Ontario ... just waiting for spring.

There are sixty we know of, and probably a lot more that haven't been reported yet. They burn down as far as ten feet below the surface, feeding off the dry needles and peat, and there's a good chance many of them will become major forest fires next spring if we don't catch them in time. Our hands are tied right now. It's difficult to get men, equipment and water to the sites at this time of year, but even if we did... how do you fight an underground fire you can't see.

Who's responsible?

As usual, it's people.

Not just the careless, but experienced bush travellers and residents as well. People who just aren't aware of the hazardous conditions caused by the unusually dry weather of last fall.

The forest floor was tinder-dry when the first snow came, and it's still that way. Campfires that have been left to go out by themselves, or merely had snow kicked on them, aren't going out as they



might have in other years. Instead they're burning down, spreading out, smouldering slowly on the dry fuel.

What we're doing about it.

Right now, all we can do is hope for more snow and rain than we have any reasonable right to expect. Enough to get us back to normal moisture levels before spring. But with precipitation so far at less than half the normal rate, that's not likely to happen. So we're preparing now for what we know will be a

busy spring. We're mobilizing a large force of professional ministry staff, helicopters, water bombers and other fire fighting equipment. They'll be ready to go at the first sign of thaw to get a jump on the "sleeper fires" that have been spotted as of that date.

What you can do about it.

We're going to be busy enough come spring, so the most important thing you can do is make sure that you don't light the fuse on another winter fire. If at all possible, avoid lighting a fire while in the woods. Use propane stoves and heaters if you have them, or use a thermos for hot drinks. If a fire is necessary, build it on bare rock and make sure it doesn't spread out too far. When you're finished, make sure it's out... dead out. Dig down and around the site to make sure it isn't still smouldering underground.

Finally, as you travel through the forest, keep your eyes open for any "sleeper fires" and report them immediately to your closest office of the Ministry of Natural Resources.